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ALASKA People

June - July 2001

Retiring Employees



Is BLM ready?

Are we fading away?

Looming exodus a "human time bomb"
already affecting BLM-Alaska



by Ed Bovy

"Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," said Gen. Douglas MacArthur to the U. S. Congress 40 years ago. Could it be that today's BLMers are fading away too?

Look over your cubicle divider to your left and to your right. If you are going to be here five years from now, one of the two people you just looked at will be gone. Based on service computation dates, about 30 percent of BLM-Alaska employees will be eligible for retirement between now and 2005.

This is not a future problem but one facing us now. In fact, 10 percent of us could walk out the door this year. That's significant and these figures do NOT include other forms of attrition such as transfers or resignations.

Retirement affects everyone

When someone leaves, a "hole" in the organization is created and work is reassigned to those who remain. You might have to cover for two or more positions, possibly for an extended period of time. Or your supervisor might be gone. The public may have to interact with a new employee who is not up to speed and possibly even receive inaccurate information that you have to "fix." So everyone is affected by retirements one way or another.

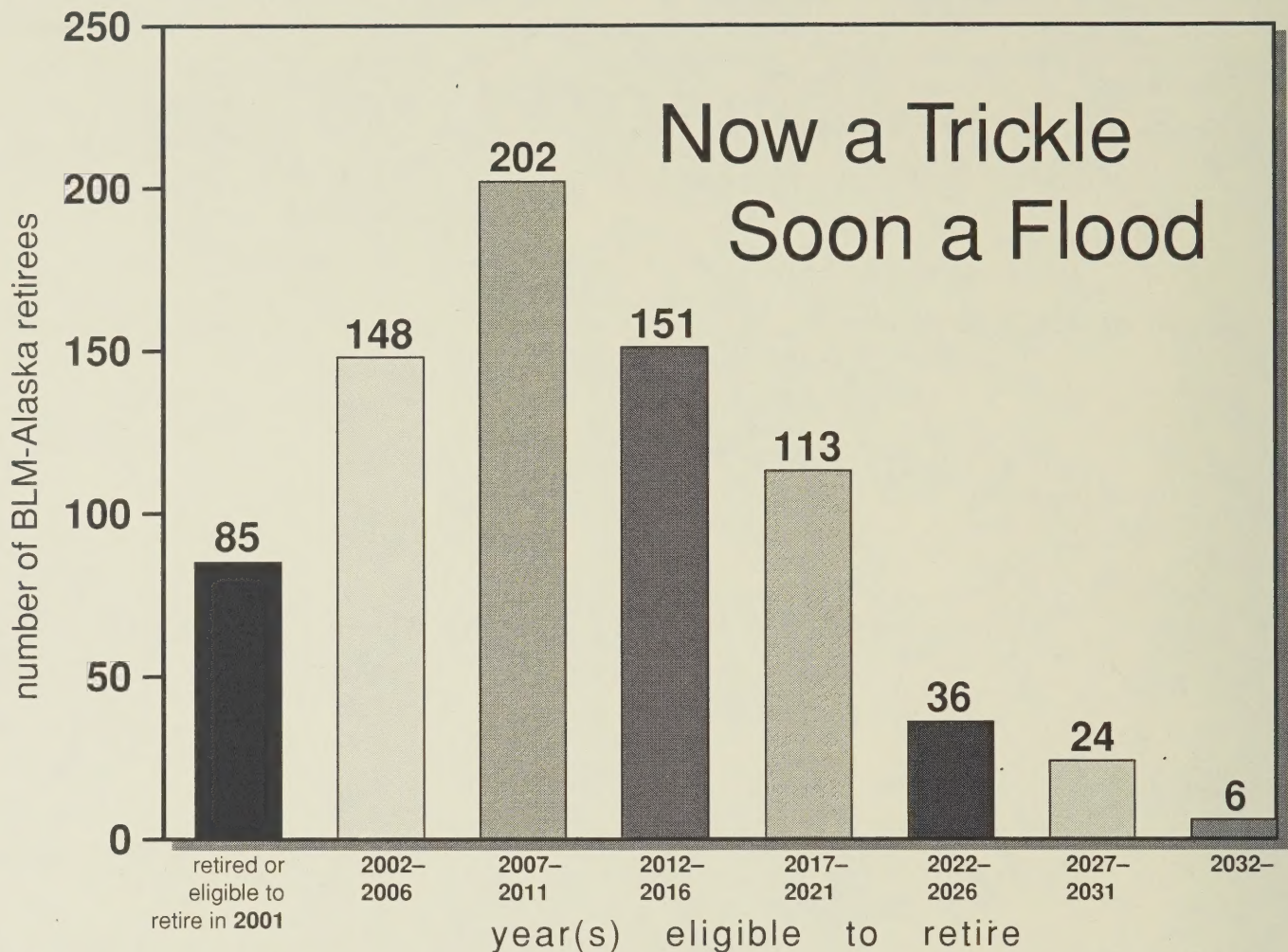
At a time when BLM is facing the challenge of managing the public lands under unprecedented growth in the population and economies of the western states, more employees will be leaving than ever before. In Alaska, BLM also faces a huge, new workload generated by increased oil and gas leasing on the North Slope. Increased recreational activities will require us to conduct the proper biological studies, write environmental analyses and EISs, and monitor applicants compliance with surface protection stipulations.

ASD **Linda Rundell** looks at the big picture and observes, "There's no doubt we're going to be hurting. We're talking about people who have years and years of historical knowledge. And I'm not sure we've done a good job of passing this knowledge on to the next generation."

The 1990s saw significant reductions in the clerical and managerial ranks to downsize agencies in response to budget cuts. But this latest retirement wave is part of a new national trend as the baby boomers start turning gray and prepare to "check out." Now the "super-techs" are going.

For example, in May at a retirement party in the Northern Field Office, 127 years of federal experience went out the door as natural resource specialist **Larry Field** (31 years), audio-visual specialist **Dan Gullickson** (35 years), and realty specialist **Dave Mabraten** (36 years) retired and public affairs specialist **Sharon Wilson** (25 years)

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Employees

- If you are thinking about retiring, let your supervisor know at least a year in advance if possible. Figure it will take six months or longer to replace you. By giving BLM advance notice, in some cases your replacement can arrive in time to get trained by you.
- If you are nearing retirement age, don't resent it if your supervisor asks you what your plans are—it is good workforce management and something a manager has to do.
- Before you retire, let colleagues (particularly those outside BLM) know when you are going and work with your manager to help anyone acting in your place.
- Get your files in order. Leave instructions for your acting and/or your eventual replacement.
- When the big day comes, don't leave a mess but don't take things that should remain. Make copies of reports and files you want to keep. Leave a way for people to contact you if they have any questions.
- Check with your replacement if you leave before your position is filled to see if you can help them.

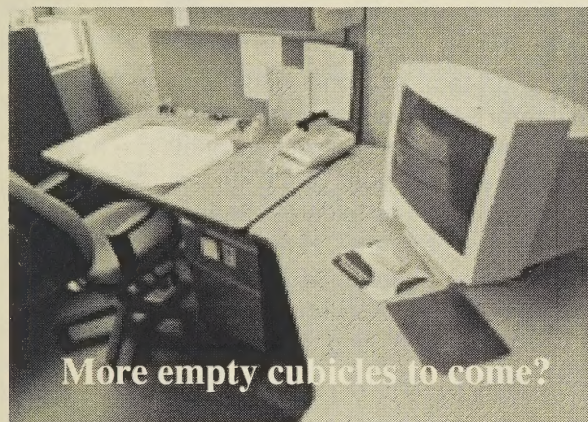
Supervisors

- Get proactive about your staffing levels. Know when key employees are eligible to retire. Service computation dates can be obtained via FPPS and the Internet.
- Periodically educate your staff how they can help your unit by keeping everyone informed of their retirement plans.
- Always respect requests of confidentiality of retirement plans from employees and treat those nearing retirement the same as other employees.
- Look to the future. What skills are emerging as essential to your staff in accomplishing their mission? Do you have these skills now or do you need to get them?
- Budget some time to recruit new employees. Learn where to find them. Look for opportunities to explain and sell your program both inside and outside BLM. Be alert for people that would complement your work group. For example, retirees from the military or private industry can be valuable employees because of their different expertise and perspectives.

transferred to Washington. "The expertise and corporate memory of these individuals will be very hard to replace," says **Bob Schneider** NFO district manager, "Thank goodness they are still alive. At least I can call them up!"

Many supervisors caught by surprise

"Many times employees are hesitant to tell people, particularly their supervisors, that they are going to retire," said personnel supervisor **Sandy Larson**, "yet the supervisors are the ones that need to know.



More empty cubicles to come?



"We're going to be hurting."

ASD Linda Rundell

**"Only supervisors can ...
reduce workforce imbalances."**

Sandy Larson

"Retirement is a touchy subject. Managers may be hesitant to ask because it sounds like they are trying to get someone to leave. And employees worry about keeping options open and how coworkers and managers will treat them if they know they are leaving.

"Employees need to work closely with HRM when they are getting serious about retiring. One of the first things we do is to check to see that they are, in fact, actually eligible to retire. Sometimes people have to work longer than they think they do, so the longer lead time we get, the better it is for everyone.

"Right now many managers are managing vacancies rather than entire programs. They need to identify what skills they will need to have on their staffs to be effective in the future. Only a supervisor can do the correct planning to reduce workforce imbalances," says Larson.

BLM-Alaska has seen the problem coming and is trying to develop a strategy to deal with it. "Last year we did a complete analysis of our Table of Organization," says Rundell. "Every division and office analyzed what they are currently doing and where they are headed in the future. Then the ALT developed a methodology for filling vacancies. We decide, as a team, what position gets filled first and so on down the line. In FY 2000 we filled 26 of the 40 needs that we identified," says Rundell.

It's a start. "We've also tried to double up on some positions," she continued. "In a few instances we have been fortunate and could bring on the new person before the retiree left so one could teach the other.

But we need to get even more creative, particularly with our key positions," she said.

BLM-Alaska also has identified a number of new positions and requested funding for more people to help handle anticipated workloads generated by increased leasing and drilling in NPR-A. "We estimate that we will need an additional 37 new positions, such as surface protection specialists, planners and realty specialists, to handle our projected workload for North Slope energy development," says special project coordinator **Gene Terland**. Filling these new posi-

tions, along with other positions identified for the fire program, will create a major workload for the HRM staff well beyond processing the retirees.

Replacements come at a snail's pace

Federal employment has gone through waves of expanding and contracting. For example in 1990, there were 118,000 new civilian hires nationally. But by 1994 this had decreased to only 48,000. This has gradually started to climb but young people in permanent positions are few and far between in most agencies. BLM has not escaped this trend. Look around and try to find a young, full time BLMer—nationally less than 10 percent of full-time BLMs are under the age of 30 and Alaska is no exception.

Also, BLM-Alaska's HRM division has not been immune from the cutbacks. "When I started working here in 1992, we had 24 people in HRM. Now we have only 11 in the state office plus one in Fairbanks," says Larson. "And many of these people will be facing retirement too—five or six of us in HRM can retire in three to five years," says Larson. Larson has since moved to JPO, creating another opening in a key position.

Not only was hiring reduced, "it definitely seems to take longer filling positions. It used to be we could get a job filled in 2-1/2 to three months. We had fewer approvals to go through and more local hiring. Even field offices could hire. Now it typically takes six months or more," says Rundell.

Alaska's distant location also contributes to the time

needed to relocate someone from the lower 48.

When special agent **Pete Johnson** announced his retirement, his job was advertised before he left in early June. Still, his replacement **Pam Stuart**, a ranger from Montana will not arrive until early August, leaving AFO's **Dave Stimson** acting for two months. **Anne Jeffery**, chief of External Affairs, gave notice in January that she would be transferring to Washington D.C. BLM-Alaska had to request permission from Washington to fill the vacancy before it could even begin advertising. Six months elapsed before the

"If current trends continue, BLM offices will look more and more like senior citizen centers."

Anonymous

packet was sent to Washington and a permanent replacement will not be on board until sometime next fiscal year. There will be at least four acting public affairs chiefs in the interim for this key position.

Rundell feels that many of the problems can be traced back to the early 90s when BLM and other agencies went to two-tiered organizations. "The smaller personnel offices all over the government were eliminated and personnel actions became more centralized in regional offices and Washington," she said. Managers at the field level used to be able to hire people locally a lot faster and easier.

More changes came a few years later when the state HRM staff reorganized, changing from specialists to generalists. Larson says the change was for the better, allowing each staff member to service all the needs of an assigned division and providing a one-stop point of contact for employees. "It also meant that if someone is out on vacation or training, things don't grind to a halt because others on the staff can fill in," said Larson.

But Rundell is not so sure. That's one of the reasons she has requested a special management evaluation of HRM to see how well things are working and whether anything else should be done to improve service to employees and the organization as a whole. "In early August, an outside review team will take an objective view of all our in-state operations," says Rundell. A preliminary report will be presented to her by the middle of the month.

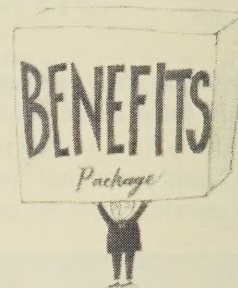
Regardless of whether you will be resigning, transferring or retiring, one day you won't be working here any more. Unless all of us pay more attention to workforce planning, those of us left will be working harder than ever before.

Bovy is a public affairs specialist for External Affairs at the Alaska State Office.

Seasonals Get Boost

by Andy Williams

This spring federal health insurance programs experienced a bumper crop of enrollments from the Alaska Fire Service. Eighty-five AFS employees became eligible for health insurance benefits under a National Fire Plan program.



National Fire funds made it possible for short-term seasonal workers to be offered long-term career seasonal positions which will result in better health benefits. Short-term seasonals are not eligible for federal employees group life insurance and health benefits. As long-term career seasonals, they may enroll in these programs. However, they must continue to pay their share of health insurance costs while in non-pay status. According to AFS personnel assistant **Kathy Jurussi**, long term seasonals employees work at least six months, but less than the full year.

Jurussi said the change also improves retirement benefits by crediting more time toward service computation dates. Individuals receive credit up to six months of non-pay status time in a calendar year.

The program affects smokejumpers, fire specialists and hot shot crew members but also warehouse workers, dispatchers and other employees, according to **Rex McKnight**, branch chief of Fire Management Resources.

McKnight says the lack of health benefits for people who work less than six months has been an issue in the past, and the change should help in recruiting and retaining seasonals, he said.

Many career seasonals have worked for the Alaska Fire Service for several years. **Chris Silks**, a smokejumper for 11 years and a crew member on the Midnight Suns for two years said a lot of people have left because of the lack of health benefits. "Not many people would wait 13 years like I did," he said. "For people who want to make a living, and start a family, this is a significant bonus."

McKnight said there is plenty to keep the seasonal employees busy for more than six months. "Prescribed fires and hazardous fuels projects in Alaska, and projects in the Lower 48 will provide plenty of work," he said.

The National Fire Plan was adopted after the severe 2000 fire season. It is a cooperative, long-term effort of the Department of Interior, U.S. Forest Service and the National Association of State Forest which provides initiatives and funding for wildland fire activities. *Williams is a writer-editor for the Alaska Fire Service.*



Employee Profile

Just being around John Miller makes you feel good. He's one of those people who has something good to say or is looking for something fun for employees to do. He's worked in the BLM Alaska State Office since 1984 as an electronics mechanic, so sooner or later everyone will have some dealings with Miller. He's the guy who performs maintenance on personal computers, fax machines, telephones, printers and LAN patch panels and hubs. He manages and programs the Northern Telecom DSM-100, providing telephone service for more than 300 customers. He also serves as lead technician for installing and maintaining inside plant wiring.

He was born in Washington D.C. but grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. He has a twin brother and is one of 10 children. Miller says it's great being in a big family because there is always something going on.

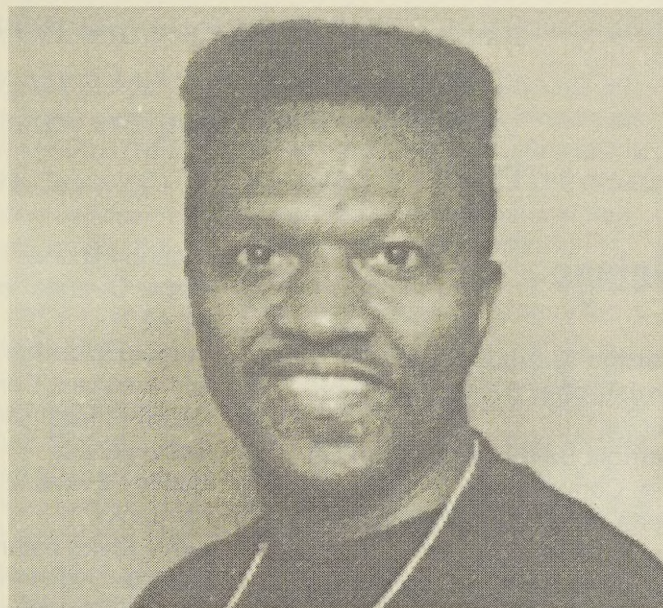
He ran track in junior high school and was on the swim team in high school specializing in the 100-yard back stroke. After graduation, he enlisted in the Air Force where he was a crew member on the C-130 cargo plane and later became an aircraft load master. During that time he married Rosemary, his childhood sweetheart, in 1973.

Before leaving the military, he spent three months working with BLM as a carto technician. It was part of a military program which helped transition military into the civilian workforce. BLM was so pleased with Miller's work that a position was created for him upon his departure from the military.

Miller remembers working in BLM's old offices in the Cordova building before the state office moved to the new Anchorage Federal Building. But it wasn't long before he quit BLM and began taking electronics and drafting classes at the Anchorage Community College. He didn't stay more than six months before he left for other on-the-job opportunities at the Federal Aviation Administration Electronics Academy. He relocated to King Salmon where he worked as an electronics technician. But after moving back to Anchorage, he returned to college where he got his associate's degree in electronic technology from the University of Anchorage Alaska.

He worked nine years for the FAA in their Special Maintenance Shop where he performed electronic maintenance, electronics calibration, trouble shooting electronic equipment, installed radio transmitter and receiver sites, mountain top repeater installations, etc. It's the variety of work which keeps him going. "I like working with cables, telephone and computer wiring." But for Miller it's the people which makes his job special. "BLM has some of the best employees. . . Its like a family . . . compared to FAA."

Miller, a big family man just celebrated his 28th anniversary with Rosemary. He still plays a big part in his three children's lives—Jevon, LaShonda and Kesha. He says, "God blessed me with a great wife and children."



John M. Miller, Jr. **Electronics Mechanic**

How long have you lived in Alaska? since June 1972

What do you enjoy most about your job? The variety of work and the people I meet throughout BLM, JPO and DOI.

What is your idea of a good time? Everyone getting together dancing, eating and having fun.

What was your favorite job? putting a smile on the user's face after their request is granted.

If you had one year to live, what would you do? Retire from my job and spend time traveling with my wife and enjoying my children.

Name one thing which people would be surprised to know about you? I can twirl a baton, weave grass baskets, cut hair, use a sewing machine, and write poetry.

What does your "ultimate meal" consist of? Fish, scallops, shrimp, deep fried halibut and vegetables.

What bad habit would you like to break? Stopping short of the goals I'd like to accomplish.

What is the most important thing you've learned since working for the BLM? I've learned that no matter what religion you are, your nationality or where you come from, people like to get together and have fun and be treated with respect.

Staff Track

UPDATE—The following are employees that have left BLM since mid 1999. The upcoming issue of *Alaska People* will include new hires during the same time period.

Goings

Gordon Amundson, AFS
Christopher Bailey, Cadastral Survey
Patricia Baker, land law examiner, Conveyances (retired)
Rena Baker, land law examiner, Conveyances (retired)
Roxanne Benbow, procurement analyst, Support Services to Dept. Agriculture, Palmer
Gayle Bishop, secretary, Field Surveys
Ralph Bissonnette, communications branch chief, AFS (retired)
Phoebe Blackwell, Support Services
Alison Boyce, travel clerk, AFS
Shelly Boyer-Wood, land law trainee, Div. Land, Minerals, Res.
Daniel Burrows, AFS (retired)
Helen Cameron, office automation assistant, Conveyances (retired)
Mark Campbell, AFS
Shirley Cleaver, AFS
Lance Clouser, forestry technician/spotter, AFS
Heather Coats, Conveyances
Nathan Collin, biological technician, Northern Field Office
Bryan Phillip Combs, AFS
Robert Conquergood, br. chief, Field and Office Services, Support Services
Michelle Corrigan, biological technician, Northern Field Office
Melvin D'Anza, material handler, Support Services (retired)
Allen Dietz, Jr., computer spec, Info. Technology, Support Svcs.
Rodney Dow, forestry technician, AFS (retired)
Janelle Dunaway, staff assistant, Juneau Minerals Information Ctr.
Roger Dvorak, computer specialist, AFS
Pamela Eldridge, office automation assistant, Conveyances
Glenn Elliott, land law examiner, Conveyances
Hawley Evans, Engineering, Fairbanks
Larry Field, natural resource specialist, NFO (retired)
Yvonne Finley, contract specialist, Procurement, Support Services
David Follett, Alaska Fire Service
Cheryl Fusco, school business partnership, Cadastral Survey
Frances Goen, contracting specialist, AFS (retired)
Joseph Greenwood, AFS
Luther Gripper, Alaska Fire Service
Daniel Guillickson, audio visual specialist, Northern Field Office (retired)
Christopher Havener, AFS
Eve Heavner, land law examiner, Conveyances (retired)
Judith Hinkle, office automation asst., Joint Pipeline Office
Dwight Hovland, soils scientist, Div. Lands, Minerals and Resources (retired)
Casey Hull, AFS
David Ihly, AFS
Anitra Ingham, AFS
Anne Jeffery, Chief, Public Affairs, to Washington, D.C.
James Johnson, fire aviation lead, Alaska Fire Service, Anchorage (retired)
Peter Johnson, special-agent-in-charge (retired)
Aaron Jokisch, fuels management specialist, AFS
Robert Jones, equal opportunity

specialist, JPO (retired)
Randy Kamp, aircraft handler, Alaska Fire Service (retired)
Denice Knight-Slater, Information Technology
Paula Krebs, GIS coordinator, Div. Lands, Minerals and Resources (retired)
Robert Krenzelok, general engineer, Joint Pipeline Office
Julie Landreth, AFS
Jennifer Lind, office automation assistant, Conveyances
Errol Locker, Support Services (retired)
Kenneth Maas, geologist, Juneau Mineral Information Center
Marlow Macht, AFS
Shirley Macke, land law examiner, Div. Lands, Minerals and Resources
Jeannie McAlpin, cook, Alaska Fire Service
Thomas McGuire, HAZMAT coordinator, Alaska Fire Service
Kevin McPhee, AFS
Glen Miller, natural resource specialist, Tok Field Office
David Mobraten, realty specialist, Northern Field Office (retired)
Gail Morrison, GIS section chief, Cadastral Survey
Bruce Nelson, forestry technician, AFS
Darrell Nielsen, Engineering, Fairbanks
Helen Oradei, office automation asst., Cadastral Survey (retired)
Tracie Batso Pendergrast, fire support assistant, AFS
Gregory Pierson, Alaska Fire Service
Heather Poff, student, Cadastral Survey
George Rainey, aircraft freight leader, AFS (retired)
Timothy Reed, air operations specialist, AFS (deceased)
Benjamin Robinson, lead material handler, AFS (retired)
James Robson, Information Technology, Support Services
Mike Rose, safety officer to FWS, Anchorage

Cool News

Carlos Rosas, electronic mechanic, AFS (retired)
Matthew Sager, AFS
Dwight Sandlin, computer spec., Info. Technology, (retired)
Troy Schmitt, Cadastral Survey
John Settle, AFS
Avraham Shalom, forestry technician, AFS
Cindy Sherfick, electronic mechanic, AFS
Erin Shockley, Alaska Fire Service
Todd Stark, AFS
Geraldine Stewart, fire support assistant, AFS (retired)
Eric Stoll, land surveyor, Cadastral Survey
Frances Strausbaugh, accounting technician, AFS
Marshall Strauss, cartographic technician, Cadastral Survey (retired)
Pamela Tacquard, resource interpretive spec., NFO
Murry Taylor, forestry technician leader, AFS (retired)
Marina Thompson, forestry technician, AFS
Alison Van Dyke, Alaska Fire Service
Daliah Wallis, AFS
Debra Waltman, Anchorage Field Office
James Ward, fixed wing spec., Alaska Fire Service (retired)
Joseph Webb, fisheries biologist, Northern Field Office
Barry White, Alaska Fire Service
Todd White, AFS
Sheila Williams, personnel actions clerk, Support Services, Fairbanks
Brenda Wilmore, AFS
Sharon Wilson, public affairs specialist, NFO to Washington, D.C.
Rita Wood, docket clerk, Support Services (retired)
Yolanda Woodcock, accounting technician, AFS
Steven Worden, supply branch chief, AFS (retired)
Claire Worden, fire support asst, AFS

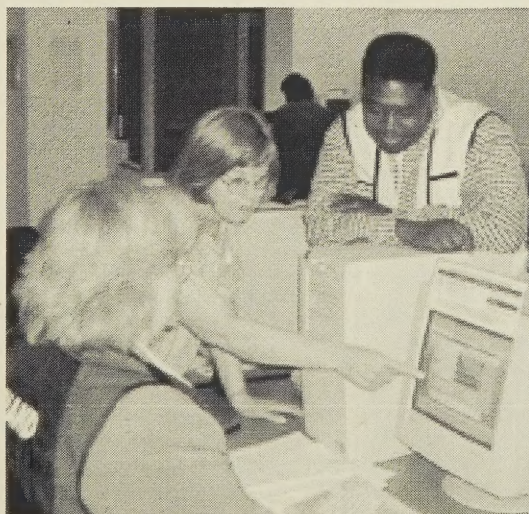
Ranger Gets the Goods. Former NFO ranger **Randy Tracy** sends greetings from New Mexico. Tracy recently received the Secretary's Award for Outstanding Service with Valor for his work on several criminal investigations involving theft of oil and archaeological resources on the public lands.

Actings Galore. Wyoming Public Affairs chief **Susanne Moore** returned to Wyoming after enduring a June of sunshine and blue skies in Anchorage during her stint as acting public affairs chief. Her replacement, **Jody Weil**, from the Montana State's External Affairs Office wasn't as lucky. The law of averages asserted itself with July setting an all-time record for rain. Jody serves through August 10. Let's hope the sunny skies return before she leaves and that **Patrick Wilkinson**, from Legislative Affairs on detail from Washington, D. C. in August, will have better luck.

National Geographic Looks at Public Lands. The August issue of

National Geographic features an extended article on BLM-managed public lands and the issues facing the agency in the west. The project generated so much material that *National Geographic* decided to produce a major book about us! Right now *National Geographic* photographer Melissa Farlow is touring Alaska. In early July, **Ed Bovy** and **Jeff Brune** showed her the Campbell Tract. **Craig McCaa** will take her to the Steese NCA, White Mountains NRA and up the Dalton Highway.

Recycling Program Helps Environment and Less Fortunate. An aluminum recycling program, coordinated by **Jerry Risch**, is responsible for the collection and recycling of more than 1,000 lbs of aluminum cans. About \$200 has been raised, and the money is split between Bean's Cafe and Brother Francis Shelter. Participating in the program are employees from BLM's Alaska State Office, Campbell Tract Facility, and the Campbell Creek Science Center and Regional Solicitor's office.



Rhea DoBosh, JPO's information officer (pointing) reviews information used during the Lowe River Oil Spill drill conducted June 27, 2001 by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. The Joint Pipeline Office and numerous state and federal agencies participated in the large scale oil spill contingency plan exercise.

your health

Bad Breath

What can you do about it? Everybody has had it. In most cases, the odor comes from your gums or tongue where bacteria from decaying food particles reside. Good dental hygiene will usually take care of it. Besides regular brushing and flossing your teeth, make a practice of scraping your tongue.

But persistent bad breath can have other causes. Be aware that gum disease, diabetes, kidney or liver disease, dry mouth, smoking or chewing tobacco, stress, dieting, age and hormonal changes can cause halitosis.

Consult your doctor and he will tell you if you have any of these conditions and suggest treatment.

Sources—Academy of General Dentistry;
American Dental Association



Is Cadastral Survey employees trying to bring sunshine to our otherwise soggy summer?

(l-r) Susan DiPrete, Terry Hobbs, Kathy Flippen, George Oviatt, Gus Panos, Rhonda Reynolds, Dot Tideman, Tony Reynolds, Sam Guim, Ralph Basner, Bruce Ockrassa

Alaska People

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